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Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/13 of 28 October 1998, in which the Assembly took note with appreciation of the resolutions adopted and activities carried out so far by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in support of United Nations actions in the field of peace and security, economic and social development, international law and human rights, democracy, gender issues and governance, and looked forward to continued close cooperation between the two organizations.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly decided to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-fourth session the item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union", and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Assembly at that session on various aspects of cooperation between the two organizations, including information made available by IPU on preparations for the Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments in 2000.

II. Parliamentary support to the United Nations provided through the Inter-Parliamentary Union

3. As a reflection of the particular importance that the Secretary-General attaches to contacts and advocacy with Parliaments for a parliamentary dimension to the work of the Organization, including by addressing them on the occasion of his visits to different countries, the cooperation between the United Nations and IPU has continued and been reinforced since the Secretary-General submitted his last report on that subject (A/53/458). The now well-established IPU Liaison Office with the United Nations has been a contributing factor to this enhanced cooperation.

4. The Secretary-General especially welcomes progress made in the preparation of the Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments which is to be held at United Nations Headquarters from 30 August to 1 September 2000, in conjunction with the Millennium Assembly. IPU has established a Preparatory Committee for the Conference, which is composed of 15 presiding officers of national parliaments, representatives from the two founding parliaments of IPU and six members of the IPU Executive Committee, and has benefited from the active participation

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of the representative of the Secretary-General at its meetings in Vienna, Austria (February 1999), and Rabat, Morocco (September 1999).

5. This Conference, which is part of IPU's action to channel parliamentary support to the United Nations, can be a major milestone in efforts made to enhance the people's understanding of and support to the United Nations through their elected representatives and in identifying ways of relaying United Nations decisions and recommendations more efficiently at the national political level for their effective follow-up. This Conference also offers a welcome opportunity to explore ways to strengthen and deepen the relationship between the United Nations and IPU.

6. In a further consolidation of the agreement of cooperation signed between the United Nations and IPU in 1996, IPU signed an Agreement of Cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) in May 1999 and a Memorandum of Understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in July 1999. Both documents are intended as means for national parliaments to give concrete support to actions by ILO and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in their respective fields of competence, especially with regard to the ratification and implementation of international treaties and norms. These initiatives are welcome, as are the steps already taken to implement them through concrete action.

A. Promotion of peace and security

Nuclear weapons

7. At the IPU Conference held in Brussels in April 1999, IPU addressed the question of parliamentary follow-up on issues related to disarmament. It encouraged all countries to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty prohibiting all nuclear testing, and encouraged universal and non-discriminatory nuclear non-proliferation measures and work towards the elimination of all nuclear weapons. IPU worked closely with the United Nations Secretariat in the preparation of the background documents for parliamentary discussion of the agenda item on this subject.

Anti-personnel mines

8. As part of its continued efforts to support United Nations efforts to secure a worldwide ban on anti-personnel mines, IPU pursued its survey of parliamentary action in the field. It also adopted by consensus in September 1998, at Moscow, a resolution urging Governments and parliaments to take the necessary steps for the early ratification of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and for the adoption of laws and regulations ensuring full compliance with that treaty.

International humanitarian law and humanitarian action

9. In the same resolution of September 1998, the Council of IPU also recommended parliamentary action for ensuring respect of the norms of international humanitarian law. The specialized committee of IPU has developed, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross, a handbook for parliamentarians whose release coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, and which should help promote respect for these treaties. IPU is in the process of further strengthening its cooperation with and support to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

International Criminal Court

10. IPU, which has consistently called for the establishment of an international penal tribunal, made an oral contribution to the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court. At its 100th Conference (September 1998), IPU urged all States that had not yet done so to sign and ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (PCNICC/1999/INF/3) and recommended that national parliaments work actively towards this end. It further recommended that parliaments exert all their influence to bring about the speedy and effective functioning of the Court.

World drug problem

11. At the IPU Conference held in Moscow in September 1998, IPU addressed the issue of consumption and illicit trafficking of drugs and organized crime as a serious threat to peoples and States. Following up on the twentieth special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, the Conference called upon States and the international community at large to devote greater attention to solving the drug problem and recommended that the Assembly and regional and subregional organizations establish multilateral procedures to evaluate progress of national strategies on the world drug problem.

Security and cooperation in the Mediterranean

12. IPU has continued its efforts to promote security and cooperation in the Mediterranean, an issue currently being addressed by the General Assembly. The latest thematic preparatory meeting for the IPU III Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) — which will be held in France in March 2000 — was held in Ljubljana (Slovenia) and concentrated on "Cooperation in armaments control in the Mediterranean with a view to preventing conflicts in the region". The United Nations Secretariat provided assistance in the selection of panellists for that meeting. The meeting paid special attention to the idea of working towards the adoption of a convention on small arms and urged that parliaments and their members join the world campaign for the elimination of these arms. It also called for a world summit meeting on terrorism.

Middle East

13. IPU supported the initiative by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People through the participation of the President of the IPU Council in the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference convened in February 1999 in Rome. At its CSCM meeting in Ljubljana (referred to in para. 12 above), IPU later expressed support to the Bethlehem 2000 Project. IPU also continues its efforts to secure a dialogue between the parliamentary leaders and representatives from the Middle East region at each of its twice-yearly statutory Conferences, within the context of its specialized committee.

Cyprus

14. In the last 12 months, IPU's continued action to support the Secretary-General's mission of good offices with regard to Cyprus has once again included sessions of dialogue between leaders or other representatives of political parties from both sides of Cyprus, organized in consultation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Cyprus, Dame Ann Hercus. At the latest session, held in Brussels in April 1999, those participating in the dialogue asked IPU to help them pursue the dialogue in Cyprus itself at Ledra Palace and to encourage other types of inter-communal contacts.

B. Promotion of democracy

15. The promotion of democracy continues to be a priority area for IPU. The expertise that it has developed through implementation of programmes in various parts of the world has also meant an enhanced cooperation with the United Nations.

Institution-building

16. The Parliamentary Support Programme concluded between IPU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in October 1998 gave further impetus to the ongoing support that IPU provides to the United Nations in its institution-building initiatives at both the global and national levels. Projects involving advisory services and technical assistance to parliaments have been initiated and continue to be implemented by IPU, with UNDP funding and substantive input, in the following countries: Fiji, Gabon, the Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Yemen. Projects in other countries are under study. IPU is also initiating an overall assessment of parliamentary assistance projects carried out in the last three decades to enable it to support even more efficiently the United Nations in its efforts to strengthen representative institutions.

17. In May 1999, IPU organized, in cooperation with UNDP, a parliamentary seminar on relations between majority and minority parties in African parliaments. The seminar, attended by over 200 members of parliament from 22 countries representing majority as well as opposition parties in parliament, adopted a set of Guidelines on the Rights and Duties of the Opposition in Parliament. The Guidelines were distributed to African parliaments to assist them in considering legislation to provide a basic legal framework in which the opposition in parliament can play a more substantive and participatory role. Similar seminars are to be held in other parts of the world with a view to developing a consolidated international instrument on the subject.

18. Contacts have already been established between the newly appointed UNDP Administrator and IPU with a view to enhancing the cooperation on governance issues.

Gender issues

19. One of the core components of IPU's work to promote representative democracy is its action in favour of partnership between men and women in society in general and in political life in particular — a concept which is key to the Beijing Platform for Action.[1] In close coordination with the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and with the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat, IPU has conducted with its member parliaments and with political parties represented within them a survey of the measures that

they have taken to give effect to the Beijing Platform for Action. Action has also been taken with a view to the holding of a tripartite meeting of representatives of parliaments, Governments and international organizations on the occasion of the June 2000 special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" ("Beijing Plus Five"), to generate increased synergy in following up the commitments taken by the States in Beijing. This process will also be fed by an IPU survey based on interviews of women politicians worldwide and the outcome of a Forum to be held at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) headquarters from 1 to 3 December 1999 by IPU and UNESCO in association with the Division for the Advancement of Women on the theme "Perspectives on Democracy: How Women Make a Difference". Likewise, IPU has been also drawing from the interaction and expertise provided by the Division for the Advancement of Women.

20. IPU has further contributed to the preparation of the United Nations survey *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics*, which will be presented to the General Assembly in June 2000, with a chapter on women in politics. It is also providing on a routine basis data on this subject to the organizations of the United Nations system. In addition, during the last 12 months, IPU has been particularly active in advocating the universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex), the lifting of any reservations limiting its effect, and the adoption of the corresponding national legislation and regulations; it also urged parliaments to take action for securing the presentation to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women of timely and detailed national reports on the implementation of the Convention. Finally, as in previous years, IPU also contributed to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women as well as to the work on gender issues of the Commission on Human Rights.

Human rights

21. In response to an earlier appeal made by IPU and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, many parliaments provided information on ceremonies and special events that they had organized to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (General Assembly resolution 217 A (III)). IPU participated, within this framework, in the meeting organized by the Government of France and UNESCO in December 1998 in Paris.

22. The above-mentioned Memorandum of Understanding between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and IPU is intended to enhance the impact of their respective activities in the field of human rights. Among such areas of cooperation are ratification of the main human rights instruments; adoption of national plans of action; establishment and strengthening of independent national institutions designed to promote and protect human rights; technical cooperation; and preparation for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance scheduled for 2001. As a first example of this cooperation, IPU and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights will encourage parliaments to become involved in the preparations for the Conference and to urge their respective Governments to support the World Conference against Racism and make the necessary funds for it available to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

23. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights contributed to the 101st Conference and related meetings of IPU which took place in Brussels from 10 to 16 April 1999. It provided oral and written information to the Inter-Parliamentary Council, the Executive Committee and the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, with a view to facilitating adoption of the above-mentioned Memorandum of Understanding between IPU and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Moreover, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights will attend a high-level human rights segment of the 102nd Conference in Berlin in October 1999 with a view to providing guidance on how to best strengthen existing cooperation between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and IPU.

24. IPU contributed to the work of the Commission on Human Rights, through oral and written contributions at its fifty-fifth session, and did likewise under the human rights segment of the substantive session of 1999 of the Economic and Social Council in Geneva. It made also an oral contribution to the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights at its fifty-first session. Close working relations are also maintained with special rapporteurs on thematic and country situations and collaboration continues with them on specific cases.

C. Follow-up to recent United Nations conferences

25. IPU and its member parliaments provide a parliamentary dimension to and support for the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations conferences on sustainable development issues, including the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the International Conference on Population and Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women, the World Summit for Social Development, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and the World Food Summit.

Sustainable development

26. In the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the IPU Council established an IPU Committee on Sustainable Development. In support of its functioning, close working relationships were established between the secretariat of IPU and the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which have included active exchange of information, coordination of work programmes and a number of joint activities. Upon the recommendation of the Committee in April 1998 in Windhoek the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its one hundred sixty-second session adopted two declarations, one on "Parliamentary Action for Sustainable Development", and the other on "Declining Official Assistance (ODA) and Financial Aid in General". Furthermore, the Committee agreed on a detailed set of recommendations addressed to national parliaments on strengthening parliamentary input into the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, adopted by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session.

Social development

27. IPU carried out a survey among parliaments on actions taken, problems encountered and further initiatives to support the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development. The results of the survey were analysed in collaboration with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). Subsequently, IPU organized, in cooperation with the Division for Social Policy and Development of the United Nations Secretariat and with the financial support of UNDP, a second tripartite meeting of representatives of parliaments, Governments and intergovernmental organizations at United Nations Headquarters in March 1999. The meeting reviewed parliamentary action since the World Summit, highlighted priority areas for action and discussed a number of new initiatives that were subsequently submitted to the Preparatory Committee for the special session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives (the special session is to be held in June 2000). IPU also made written and oral contributions to the Commission for Social Development and to the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session (see document A/AC.253/11, dated 21 May 1999).

Food security

28. Within the framework of its cooperation agreement with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), IPU held a specialized Conference on "Attaining the objectives of the World Food Summit through a sustainable development strategy" in Rome from 29 November to 2 December 1998. In the Final Document which was adopted at the end of the Conference and subsequently endorsed by the Union's governing Council, IPU proposed an agenda for parliamentary action to attain food security and pledged to work to achieve the goals of the Summit. The Director-General of FAO subsequently gave the keynote address at the IPU Conference in Brussels in April 1999.

Combating child labour

29. The above-mentioned Agreement of Cooperation between IPU and ILO offers national parliaments the means to make concrete contributions to the actions of ILO and to enhance support for the process of ratification of its conventions, application of their provisions and lifting of reservations limiting their scope. In a first example of its concrete application, IPU and ILO launched jointly a campaign for parliamentary action in support of early signature, ratification and implementation of the Convention (No. 182) Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

Combating desertification

30. IPU also works in support of the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (A/49/84/Add.2, annex, appendix II). IPU sponsored a Round Table of parliamentarians organized by the secretariat of the Convention in Dakar in December 1998 on the occasion of the meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. A Declaration was issued at the conclusion in

support of implementation of the Convention and undertaking to promote actions at local and national levels.

Urban development

31. At the IPU Conference held in Brussels in April 1999, IPU addressed the question of parliamentary follow-up on issues related to metropolitan areas and urban development and expressed support for the activities of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). It recommended a series of measures to parliaments with a view to promoting urban areas that would be more productive, more equitable and more sustainable.

Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS)

32. IPU continued its support of the Joint United Nations Programme on Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS). In particular, at the end of 1998, IPU assisted the Programme in setting up a working group of members of parliaments to prepare a handbook for legislators on how they could implement the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights.[2] The meeting took place in January 1999 and the two organizations are now finalizing the handbook.

III. Concluding remarks

33. The Secretary-General greatly appreciates the continued cooperation between IPU and the United Nations, and its programmes and the specialized agencies, and is especially grateful for IPU's commitment to helping the United Nations develop a parliamentary dimension to its work. He expresses his hope for the successful outcome of the Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments.

Notes

[1] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[2] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XIV.1.